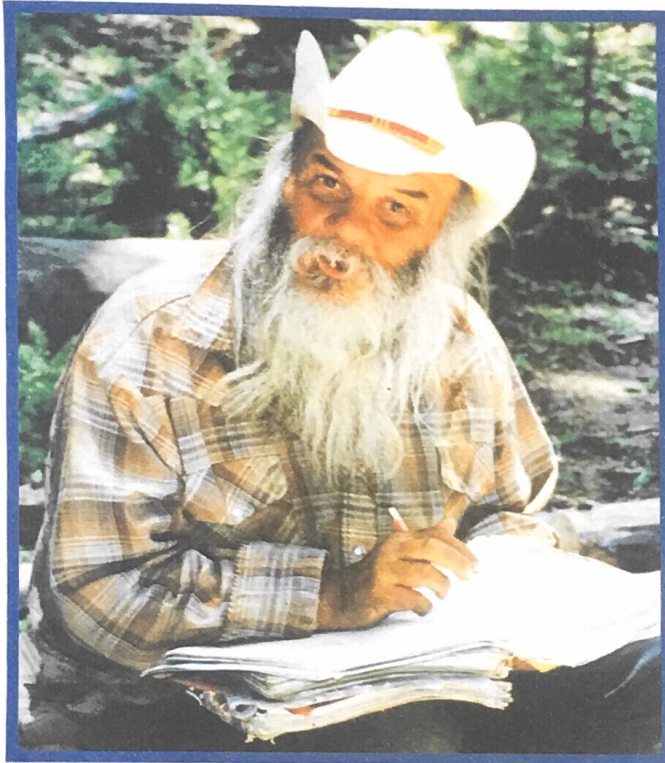


Rainbow Family

Life Stories



*by Jodey Bateman.
Interviews with Rainbow
Family of Living Light
folks conducted between
1977 and 2008.*

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Family"
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was an extension of me and I was an extension of everything else. If I felt ugly and mean, that was what I would get and if I felt high and beautiful, that was what everyone would give me.

I began looking for family—that was the term I used then. I thought the people I was staying with might be family, but I found out they weren't real close relatives—more like third cousins. I started being taken advantage of. Like the food stamps would go and I wouldn't have any food left. People were expecting me to go be places for them and wouldn't give things back.

I had a lot of confusing visions on mushrooms one night I saw a lot of Indians in circles around a fire and I understood why the people I was with couldn't be it. I suppose that's why I kept Casey, my dog, so close.

It took years to get all this stuff together. I heard about the Rainbow Gathering in Montana in 1976. I had a friend who went to that. That winter I started feeling poorly. I was pretty sick, laying in bed all day. I went to a gynecologist in February, 1977 and I told me I had a hormonal imbalance. He gave me hormone pills and X-rays—all kinds of crazy things. I'm listening to do everything he tells me. I said, "Maybe I'm pregnant." He said, "No, you're not."

So I decided not to listen to this man because he was cold—not showing any compassion. So I went on a heal-myself trip—a grape juice diet, fasts. I thought some day my body would get back into shape and I'd start having a normal menstrual flow.

Around Easter time I started feeling kind of empty. So around then my dog Casey and I went on a camping trip—just us—and I decided that Casey and I should go to New Mexico. The next thing, I found that the Rainbow Gathering was going to be there. I decided I had better get in a better physical condition and also get some money together. So I got a job as a groundskeeper. My first regular job in like three or four years. It shaped my life—having to be there at seven in the morning. I had to bike three miles to work—work hard all day and bike three miles back. It's always harder going back—getting myself into shape.

The next important thing is that I ended up in New Mexico at the Rainbow Gathering. I had to pack my stuff in. I knew I was gonna have to work hard there physically because the way in wasn't

exactly easy. I didn't expect how hard it would be before I got there. I didn't know what was gonna go on there, but I had an idea it would be like everybody doing it for each other and we did. Like if everyone worked at cooking, we ate well, and if everyone messed up, we didn't.

I felt empty when I first got there. I made up my mind before I got there that I wouldn't get involved in people's lives—especially men. But then I let people crash in my tent. A lot of men who were there would say, "Can I leave this or that in your tent?"—especially musical instruments. It got to the point of "being ridiculous. There were two men sleeping in my tent and I needed a place to sleep to get back my health. So I took a walk and there was Matt and I discussed a snake we saw with him. The next day I was feeling real productive and we found a place that felt real good to sit down and eat dinner together—like you read in Carlos Castañeda's books, finding a special spot. It's like another place in Carlos Castañeda—the world stopped. And I just felt so good. And I just felt relief because I could feel something for somebody. It made me feel real good. I feel like I could never have appreciated Matt as fully as I do if I had ever met up with him at any other time in my life.

Then the Rainbow Festival said, "We're moving out of the valley" and I was living by the Kiddle Center, so I just had to move ten feet, but Matt helped me move up with him. At the time, I felt good with what was happening. Matt started talking about where he was going after the Rainbow Festival and I thought the trip might last two or three weeks, but I knew it would affect me.

MATT

After the gathering I told my friend Mark, my brother in spirit, that me and Moreen would go up to Oregon to see him. He said he could get me a job, because he was working spud harvest and he thought there might be a place for me. And my sister was there. I thought about calling Cliff, my boss, and telling him I was in jail and so I'd be late getting back to Garden City and I told him I quit and we hitched up to Oregon. It took us two months because we were taking our time.

Moreen, Casey, our dog, and I had a fine trip to Oregon. We

had a real leisurely trip, stopping to camp wherever the country looked good. We camped a week in the Arapahoe National Forest on the southwest edge of Rocky Mountain National Park. Incredibly beautiful! Wild flowers galore, hummingbirds, wild strawberries and roses, lots of water, green grass, springs—beautiful! We stopped at Dinosaur Monument. We seen the dinosaur quarry, which is the richest deposit of fossil bones in the world. We seen rock drawings, petroglyphs left by native peoples 3,000 years ago. It boggles my mind to conceive of these communications surviving 3,000 years to be read by us. Pictures of fantastic horned men, bizarre animals, cosmic geometric designs. It saddens my heart to see where people have carved their names in the rock beside these holy inscriptions. It may sound like a gross assumption, but there was a strange energy in the air the day we visited the petroglyphs. From there we went to Flaming Gorge Recreation, which is a park centered around a lake 91 miles long. We camped two weeks at different places. Fantastic country where the sky and the mountains compete with each other to see who is the most beautiful. I feel I could be there two months and not see all I wanted to.

We stopped at Ogden, Utah, to see an old friend. It was a mind-blower dropping into that artificial concrete environment after living 1½ months in the boonies living at one with the Mother. Such uptight, unfriendly people.

We found out Moreen was pregnant. By then it was too late for abortion to be even an option. It all happened through the gross incompetence of a gynecologist in Tampa. She was wearing a diaphragm before she met me. But there was a skilled gynecologist looking into her and he couldn't see she was pregnant.

MOREEN

That gynecologist in Florida—maybe his eyes were blinded purposefully. I thought I might be pregnant by Matt when I went to Family Planning in Ogden, Utah, but they said I had been pregnant 5½ months.

A woman never thinks about what will happen when she has an abortion. She hears her boyfriend say, "Oh, you should do it," and someone else says, "You should do it," but she doesn't know.

MATT

Already I had paid \$80 to have a child of mine aborted by an old girlfriend. Then this child appeared too late to be aborted. I wonder where this child came from. I feel the Creator pressed it in on us in our charge. We used to talk about how we didn't want any children. There were so many souls already. Then zap, she was pregnant. At first I felt violent. I felt like bailing out of the whole relationship. Now I feel just like I was a father. There's some fantastic circumstances surrounding the birth of this child.

MOREEN

Just one day I didn't look pregnant and the next day I did. It's really strange.

MATT

We did fine in Oregon, but it was more from our own ingenuity than any help or even well-wishing on any other's part. We ended up camping 23 miles out of town in the mountains where we belonged. It was a good campground by a river - blueberries, currants, choke cherries all around and other fruits I wasn't familiar with. Lots of herbs and useful plants - rushes, mullein, hops, clover, sage etc.

I found my friend Mark half an hour after getting into Umatilla, Oregon - joyous reunion. Umatilla was really a drag. Just like it was in southwestern Kansas - dry, dusty, a lot of sagebrush. Then there was the Columbia River - the biggest damn river I'd ever seen, but it don't make much difference when it's 105 degrees. Moreen was pregnant, so she got welfare checks and I filed for unemployment. I made leather stuff and sold it. Mark, he drove a spud truck. We bought a GMC pickup with the money we got together for \$200 and put \$200 into it to get it running good. I learned a lot about mechanics. The second day we had the pickup, the tranny froze up. We replaced it ourselves and changed the shifting linkage from column to floor. It amazed us how easy it was. Whoever built that truck had his shit together. It was easy to work on and real durable.

We went on to Forest Grove, Oregon, to see my sister Kim. She's in the university there. My sister and her roommate and me and Moreen and Mark all slept in the same room. And the dog wasn't supposed to be there. It wasn't very private, but it was kind of funny. Like I sleep in the nude and I had scabies and I was using some kind of stuff to get rid of them and Kim's room mate came in with a friend and found me rubbing in the stuff.

The country around Forest Grove is stunning, but there is too many people crammed together. Funky vibes. We went to Washington and I got to see the ocean for the first time. We picked apples near Yakima for a day and a half. Then we went on to Montana for a week. It was cold. We applied for food stamps like we did everywhere we stopped. I spent two days making leather goods. We didn't have no luck selling them. We was having problems with the truck and problems with Mark, so we just went on our way.

We had so much food from behind grocery stores, we couldn't possibly eat it all or give it away. It was really amazing. We found so much fruits and fresh vegetables, we couldn't possibly carry it off. We canned the peaches and dried the apples. We got 15 pounds of rotten bananas and made banana bread. Once in Missoula behind a store we found five pounds of cottage cheese and a case of yogurt. The expiration date was the date we got there and we scarfed up, but we couldn't possibly eat it all. I've found unopened beer beside the road - salami and cheese sandwiches for the dog - money - five pounds of caramels - \$150 or \$200 worth of pop bottles, I could see how a person could live forever in the city on nothing.

We got back to Garden City and my father said, "It makes me sick to think of the way you live. I don't think of you as my son no more." He wouldn't do me the pleasure of going deer hunting with me and here I'd hitch hiked 1,200 miles to see him. He decided I wasn't good enough to go deer hunting with him because I wanted to make my own bow, and then he told me him and his brother made their own bows when they hunted.

I told him I believed the quest for material possessions leads to unhappiness. He told me a man is measured by his material possessions. That's the root of our differences. What really cracked him up was when I told him Moreen and I had been going behind grocery stores and getting veggies out of the trash.

He just thinks about himself. He worries about what people will say. He told me, "You don't know how I feel when people say, 'What is your son doing?' Do I say 'He's wandering around eating out of garbage cans?'"

He looks at me and thinks I'm making myself intentionally poor. He's always yelling at me, "Go back to school!" I don't want to

make a lot of money. It would just waste my time. I've got to keep myself alive first - me and my community. I've had to work all day to keep myself alive. I can't take eight hours a day off to work for some other man. It ain't hard when you're living in a tent - getting veggies from behind the store. I do my leather work. I'm still a beginner, though. I like working in the medivm. I got some tools from my sister to try some leather tooling. I ain't no artist, but I can make geometric figures. When I was traveling around, I met a lot of leather people and they gave me a lot of ideas about what I can do. Like I showed one guy my copy of Good Medicine, the traditional dress issue, and he showed me a design for a drawstring pouch.

It's funny. I thought my grandparents - my mother's parents - would mind when me and Moreen went to see them and she was pregnant and we weren't married - especially after seeing my father. But they didn't mind. They said it was just fine.

My mother's father only has an eighth grade education. He dropped out to work on the railroad. He was a farmhand as long as I could remember until he had his heart attack. He's told me about other jobs he's had like working in an underground limestone quarry and logging walnut trees until they gave out. There ain't lumber grade walnut trees standing no more. He drove trucks hauling grain, drove a bulldozer in World War II to build an air strip. He was always a blue-collar worker, living off the sweat of his back. I've always liked my grandparents, even though I thought their life-style was destructive. Like I wouldn't log walnut trees. But I'm not going to tell them. It's their life.

I don't do any man-made chemicals now. If I had the chance and I felt in the right space, I would do mushrooms and peyote - natural hallucinogenics. I smoke marijuana now more for social reasons than to get high. Beer and marijuana are inadequate for my purposes. Moreen and the mountains really get me high.

I've got to raise a kid. I want to settle down somewhere. What I've got in mind is getting a pickup truck and a tipi so we can mobilate instead of hitching. That would be right for the life-style we have. I feel the mission the Creator has for us is the raising of this

child. Both of us are completely disillusioned with Western medicine. It's bullshit. She wanted a natural childbirth. There is a spiritual community called The Farm in east Tennessee that we went shooting for. We heard the people there are into midwifery and living like human beings. I thought it would be the kind of place I want my child to be for the early years of its life.

The Farm is an interesting community and undoubtedly the place for some people to live, but it was not my path. It gave me the impression of a bunch of city slickers hiding out in the boonies. Something I was told a number of times was - the Farm is a school of life and everyone is on different levels. That place put us through some changes. When you first get there, you have to hang out at the gate for a while, while the folks there find out who you are, what you want, how long you're going to stay and just feel your vibes. The Farm is a very family-oriented community. There are a lot of kids and pregnant ladies there and nutty, distressing or dangerous people aren't allowed in.

Then you generally go to the visitors' tent - a frame building with a tin roof and canvas walls. There are different classes of visitors. It's anything but a classless society. Straight visitors are generally allowed two or three days for a visit. If you are thinking of making the Farm your home, you get two weeks, at the end of which you have to sign on or leave. These people are called "soakers." You actually sign on to become a Farm member. You agree to follow Farm policy, which is generally pretty loose. Also a vow of poverty in which you give up all money and possessions other than personal.

Then there are people on a midwives' agreement. The midwives like people to go there at least six weeks before the due date so they can acclimatize to the Farm. When we first got there, we went into culture shock after being pretty much by ourselves in the country, then being thrown elbow to elbow in the visitors' tent.

We got there on a Saturday and they insisted we had to go to Sunday services and I said my heart wasn't into it. And they laughed at me because I talked about what was in my heart. I saw things at the Farm I didn't like and I told people about it instead of just taking in what they had to say. Here I was just coming from the Rainbow.

Gathering and I had a lot of ideas from that, but they don't seem to want to hear nothing you got to say. They want positive juice on their trip.

Like I have a strong feeling about the earth and how people should treat it and they have a low regard for the intelligence of our animal brothers and the energy manifest in plants and the earth energy. You walk through the woods on the Farm and you inevitably find shit abandoned lumber they couldn't use, pieces of plastic sheets and canvas. They thought it wasn't an important thing to be concerned with esthetics. They told me they thought my trip was unimportant.

They don't eat meat because it's taking life. They don't even eat eggs, because that's messing with unborn chicken karma. They do get honey in care packages from friends, and that's a contradiction in their philosophy because honey is an animal product. I seen beehives there, but to provide the whole farm with honey would be an immense task, so they consume an immense amount of sugar. They're sugar freaks. And on the farm, leather is taboo.

I told them I didn't think it would matter if you ate meat, but how you ate it. Like I wouldn't eat commercially killed meat, but you have to kill to live. They weren't conscious that they were taking a life when they harvest plants to eat. It was just grabbing stuff to them.

But I'm making generalizations. Like you could say people at the Farm eat lots of soybeans and it's true. Some people eat massive amounts of soybeans and other people just eat two tablespoons of soys a day.

I was in a crew picking greens and I said it would be nice if we had somebody playing a guitar and singing while we was picking to create some mellow vibes while we worked, and they just laughed at the idea. Every house in the Farm has a guitar, but they mostly just listen to canned music on the radio. They have boogies ever so often and play electric music you can hear a mile away. I didn't go, but I could hear them playing.

There are very few hard rules at the farm, aside from things like no alcohol, no tobacco. But there's some people who make an interpretation and then say it comes from Stephen Gaskin. Stephen called me down. He said I was intimidating people and copping an attitude. I

Don't know what copping an attitude means. It's just a word people on the Farm use. For some reason I was attracting a lot of people's attention and Stephen is like the ultimate counsellor and people go to him. I never met him face to face, but they went to him about me. One Sunday it was real nasty weather and they didn't get together for the services. They broadcast them over their radio. And Stephen spoke about copping an attitude and talked about incidents over a period of time I was involved in like picking fights, verbal fights. Then Stephen said, "How about some feedback on that, Matthew?"

Living at the Farm is a constant bust. That's what they call it when they get on your case about something. Like you get busted for being uptight. Somebody is always busting someone for doing something that's not right in their eyes.

A son was born to us on December 21, 1977 at 4:15 p.m., the winter solstice. He is beautiful. Born on a god holiday recognized by man for thousands of years. His middle name is Selu, which means corn in Cherokee. A sacred name for a sacred child. It is a good child name and a name to remind him of the two sides to every two-legged. His first name I want to be a strong name befitting a warrior. A man name. The birthing was an incredible experience. I'll never forget seeing Selu's head between Moreen's legs.

We stayed on the Farm from late November till early January. Although the weather was mild, Moreen was tired of winter. She thought of going to the Farm's place in Homestead, Florida. We got to Miami with a bunch of Farm people who went down to the Homestead Farm south of Miami taking personnel in a bus one way and avocados and oranges back. They drove 1,000 miles straight through.

Miami is like no country I have ever seen. Really bizarre. I feel I am in the belly of the monster. It is a strong test, but I know I can retain my humanity and my sanity. I have quit drinking alcohol completely. I have also eliminated caffeine, peanut butter and oil from my diet and for now I have replaced dairy products with soy products. My thinking needs restructuring. I fear for Moreen's and I relationship. Once again I must grit my teeth and do it. Off the deep end. It takes a lot of effort to keep my family supported and loved.

Between covering my family and looking for a job and a place to live I have also been preparing for an art fest. There are many

art fairs and flea markets which provide an outlet for my creations. When I was at the Farm, I was tuned onto this substance called press blanket. It is sheets of canvas-backed rubber used in the imprint process of an offset press. Once it loses its resiliency, it is no good to the printer and is discarded. It is tough, easy to clean, water-resistant and it behaves remarkably like leather. It lends itself well to utilitarian devices like mail bags and tool holsters as well as nice-looking pouches and boxes. I am immensely pleased with the results. It is also all veggie, which provides an outlet for moral vegetarians.

I am going through some changes, I don't know if fast enough. It is hard dropping old ways to grow for better or worse. I am resisting temptation well, I think. I won't be in Miami forever.

[In March, 1978, Matt and Moreen broke up. The rest of this account is from Matt's letters and from interviews with both Matt and Moreen at the 1978 Oregon Rainbow Gathering.]

MATT

I am sad. After fully accepting the fact that I was having a son and a wife and making that commitment and busting my ass to provide for them, Moreen is taking it all away from me. We are no longer together. I hope it is not a permanent arrangement, but I feel that is a distinct possibility. I feel distinctly helpless.

I have tried really hard to put a lot of juice into our relationship and there is nothing else I can do. Moreen refused to put any energy at all into building our relationship. Just negative energy. She refused to make a commitment to me.

We found a place to move into. I repaired the roof and fixed the plumbing and the gas leaks and spaded the garden to make a nice place for Moreen and Seth. I cleared the branches and trash out of the yard so she would have something nice to look at while she was nursing him. I made stuff to sell, because that's what I went to Miami for—to make money. And I brought the money in for her and the baby. When I wasn't working, I was asleep.

I'm a Cancer and it's a thing about Cancer people that they need to know they are loved. I had to hear her say she loved me and give me a hug and she didn't.

She finally told me about the guy who was her boyfriend in Tampa - that she wished her and him was together, that he was always in the back of her mind. She said she hoped the baby looked like him. She was clinging to him and when I left, she clinged to me. I cut my hair in mourning when I moved out.

MOREEN

Matt is real good at being one of the workers, providing. There was food, there was rent, but he didn't really want to stay with me and Selu. He didn't like having to go out and work every day and coming home saying he worked so hard. It just isn't his thing. He's still young.

MATT

I feel a real need to be part of some else's thing, to help someone else outside of my own petty thing. Being separated leaves me feeling kind of aimless. I really want to be with someone else so we can juice each other's thing. I'm ready to bust my ass. I have a lot to give. I'd like to have a family and raise a kid very much, even if I'm not the child's genetic father.

All is not so sad though, even though my future is uncertain. By fluke of chance, our midwife from the Farm who caught our baby reappeared at our doorstep. It was a pleasant shock. I went to a talk Farm folks were having on their Plenty program and rapped with her a lot. The Farm folks are doing very worthwhile thing, even if they are blind to certain things.

I feel strongly about doing only moral work. Like I won't lay concrete block unless I thought it was absolutely necessary. There's too much concrete block in the world already. In Miami I worked for a very fine man who does tree work. It was satisfying, morally acceptable work. This man seemed to be an older version of me. He has lived

things I only dream about. He gave me a good perspective about things like breaking up with Moreen. We had conversations that stimulated my spiritual growth. It felt good.

Moreen is living with a lady who has a child and with an old, old friend of mine from Kansas—he's just using it for a place to crash. He came down to see me and I left two weeks later. Moreen has been helping this lady Sky. Sky is all scattered out. Before she moved in with Moreen, she had been living in a hippie crash pad with some very opinionated people. This 17 year old man was telling Sky she shouldn't nurse her baby because it made the baby's shit smell like oranges. Moreen has nursed Sky's baby. Moreen definitely has her baby trip together whereas Sky doesn't. They're able to help each other with the different places they have together.

MOREEN

I live on a tract of land now with some people in an apartment house and a family in a house of their own. I pay rent, but we all eat together and take care of the kids together. We help one another if we think the other person is blowing it. We tell that person in a gentle way. I want to study to be a teacher and try to organize a school for when Selu is old enough.

MATT

I went from Miami to Arizona to the Oregon Gathering by way of Kansas. I'm learning fast in big doses. I see things now I didn't see three months ago. I see things I didn't see two weeks ago. My body is strong and my mind is clear and things are registering whereas before, they were slipping over the top. There's something about being on the road, sleeping out of doors. Every morning when I'd wake up, I'd have a new front yard. I've had some pretty nice front yards too. I like that. I've said I'd like to be in somebody else's thing. I guess I want to be in everybody's thing. Just throw my skills and abilities so frigging far.

MOREEN

The gathering at Oregon seems different this year. There's

some close, closed units here. People are camped together in groups of 10 to 15. And there's more on the physical, material plane than last year in New Mexico. Like people say in Oregon, "We're wet, we're cold, we need food." This may be the gathering where we can get it together permanently because we're into practical things like that. There seem to be more people here this year who thought this would be a rock festival and don't know it's a sacred thing or how important it is.

[Matt moved to the Cherokee country of Oklahoma in late 1978. In summer, 1979, he went to the big summer ceremonial at the Cherokee stomp dance ground near Gore, Oklahoma, but quit because he thought the horses were being mistreated in the races.

Then he moved to Tahlequah, the old Cherokee capital and worked as a carpenter. He interested some people there in Rainbow and they started going to the gathering. He got in contact with the Oklahoma anti-nuclear power movement and attended an Indian sweat lodge ceremony they had in Tulsa in 1980. Matt has tried to be reconciled with his mother and started to college.]